Working hard with a handicap

Brooke Theiss willing to take what comes

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Actress Brooke Theiss works hard because she still remembers the time she nearly failed kindergarten.

Theiss stars in the ABC comedy series "Just the Ten of Us" and is the spokeswoman for Hasbro's Maxi doll.

She also boarded a cruise ship this summer for an NBC movie tentatively called "Semester at Sea." Last year, in "Nightmare on Elm Street IV: The Dreammaster," she turned into a giant cockroach.

Theiss tries hard because she has to. She suffers from the learning disability dyslexia.

"I make personal appearances before girls' groups and talk about my dyslexia and being held back," she said.

"I almost flunked kindergarten. I couldn't read. It wasn't until the third grade that I was tested and diagnosed as having dyslexia. I didn't know my left from my right. I still have trouble dialing the telephone."

Theiss took special classes in school and learned to read with relative ease. But she also admits that "I'd even use dyslexia as an excuse until college."

After high school, she attended New York University, which has a special program for dyslexics.

Theiss grew up in Los Angeles, the daughter of an advertising executive and a real estate saleswoman. But acting was in her genes.

Her mother had been a model and actress in the 1950s and her father played the villain in Western movies before going into advertising.

Theiss was first cast in a role in the movie "Little Nikita," which starred Sidney Poitier and River Phoenix. Her first big break was the contract to represent the Maxi doll. Hasbro produces the fashion doll for children who are too young for Barbie.

"They were looking for someone who looked like the doll," Theiss, 19, said. "I have a big wig and clothes that look like all her costumes."

Brooke Theiss, right front, stars as one of the four older sisters on ABC's "Just The Ten of Us." Jamie Luner, JoAnn Willette and Heather Langenkamp co-star.

She had just returned to New York from filming some doll commercials when she got a call to appear on ABC's "Growing Pains." Theiss flew to Los Angeles on Sunday, auditioned on Monday and began work on Wednesday.

"Just the Ten of Us" began as a spinoff of "Growing Pains" in January 1988. It airs at 9:30 p.m. Fridays on ABC.

In the show Theiss plays Wendy Lubbock, one of eight children of a football coach at an all-boys school. Jamie Luner is her twin sister, Cindy, and Bill Kirchenbauer and Deborah Harmon are the parents.

"We play them as 16," she said. "Wendy is very rambunctious and rowdy. She takes risks, she's the instigator. Cindy's more sensible and subtle."

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